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SUBJECT: MFA ON NATO PFP EXERCISES IN GEORGIA, CHOD MEETING

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Alice G. Wells. Reason 1
.4 (b) and (d).

Pfp Exercises Are a "Sensitive Issue"

¶1. (C) In an April 23 meeting, MFA General European Cooperation Director Vladimir Voronkov said the upcoming NATO Partnership for Peace (Pfp) Cooperative Longbow/Cooperative Lancer 2009 exercises were a "sensitive issue" for Russia. He pointed out that the U.S. and Georgia conducted military maneuvers one week prior to the start of the August 2008 conflict in South Ossetia, and so the optics of the upcoming Pfp exercises were bad. He complained that when the GOR asked NATO to reconsider the exercises, the reply was simply that the exercises had been scheduled well before the August 2008 conflict and that Russia was invited to participate. Voronkov urged the U.S. to consider the GOR's position, and predicted harsh words would be exchanged between NATO and Russia if the exercises happen.

¶2. (C) Cooperation in the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) would continue, and Voronkov downplayed Rogozin's April 22 "colorful" comments that Russia "cannot guarantee the safety" of NATO and Pfp participating forces. Voronkov took several ironic swipes at Rogozin, whose propensity to go far beyond his instructions has incited Voronkov's criticism in the past. We reviewed the planning for, and purpose behind, the exercises, with Voronkov acknowledging that the U.S. and Russia would continue to agree to disagree over Georgia.

Cancelled CHOD Meeting

¶3. (C) Voronkov told us the GOR never formally accepted the invitation for CHOD Makarov to meet his NRC counterparts on May 7, and he denied media reports that Russia's decision to not attend the meeting was linked to the upcoming Pfp exercises. He said that the April 29 Ambassadors meeting and the May 19 ministerial meeting should happen before the CHODs meet. Voronkov said the decision to not attend the CHOD meeting did not pose a danger to NATO-Russia military cooperation, which would proceed in a step-by-step fashion.

Russian Goals for the NRC

¶4. (C) Voronkov maintained that the GOR sought real cooperation within the framework of the NRC as envisioned in the Rome Declaration. He said the breach in NRC activities and the "26 against 1" scenario that occurred after the conflict in Georgia were reminiscent of Cold War practices.

It was time to move past this, he said. He argued "this showed the public that the NRC can exclude Russia," whereas Russia desired "smooth cooperation." The NRC is not the appropriate forum to "sanction Russia," he said. How to best deal with NATO-Russian tensions was a topic that occupied the highest levels of the MFA. Voronkov urged that more frequent and less formal conversations take place that could create an atmosphere more conducive to cooperation.

15. (C) Voronkov maintained that the NRC can be a useful forum to work on difficult issues such as Afghan stabilization, missile defense, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, Medvedev's proposed European Security Treaty (with NATO one, but not the sole suitable forum), counternarcotics efforts, piracy, terrorism, and energy security. He emphasized, however, that without a commitment to use the NRC in a time of crisis, the organization would be devalued.

BEYRLE